

NEW WEAPONS FOR THE WAR ON WEEDS

FROM A GARDENING CORRESPONDENT

A rainy day or two and a touch of sunshine will be followed by rapid growth in the garden. Unhappily the weeds will also grow, and there begins that one-sided battle which lasts until we give it up about the end of October; as we prepare for the fight each spring we look around hopefully to see if there are any new weapons or stratagems that can be used to help us.

For the small garden there is little enough new, but for the larger garden, or for the gardener who has more money than physical strength, there is the electric tiller. It appeared last season, but experience has suggested a refinement to the blades which has greatly increased its usefulness and the ease and speed with which it can be operated. An electric motor powers two pairs of rotating blades at the end of a shaft. The machine is well balanced and is easy to use. It can be pushed back and forth over the ground with little effort, using only one hand, the other hand being left free to flick the cable out of the way.

HOE AND TILLER

In its original form the blades of the tiller burrowed down quickly to a depth of about 4in., and often weeds had to be dug out rather than chopped off as in normal hoeing. It was a fine tilling tool, making a fine seed bed, but it was not intrinsically a hoe. The new blades have made the machine into an efficient and swift moving hoe that can deal with weeds anywhere in beds and borders, between plants in rows, and on paths and drives.

Failing any mechanization, hoeing can be made much easier with the redesigned, well-balanced hoe with a triangular rust-resisting blade. It certainly eases the work. Much hoeing and weeding can be eliminated, of course, if the ground is mulched with peat or bark fibre and, in parts where they will not offend, with straw or bracken. Once beds or borders have had their spring cleaning and once the soil has warmed up, say early in May, these mulches should be put on before another crop of weeds has time to germinate. But it is important not to put them on too early, or they will keep the soil from warming up and growth will not be as rapid as it should be.

BARK FIBRE

Bark fibre looks like peat but is about half the price, if the distance from the source of supply is not too great. It also lasts longer in the ground. It is, of course, excellent for digging into light soils to conserve moisture, and also to lighten heavy soils. It is necessary to apply a nitrogenous fertilizer, such as sulphate of ammonia, at the rate of three or four pounds to each hundredweight, as the bacteria which will set to work to decompose the fibre need nitrogen, and if it is not provided there may be signs of nitrogen deficiency among the crops. If it should be a dry summer the gardener who has watered well in spring

and applied a mulch several inches thick will be able to congratulate himself, at least about his early summer crops.

Straw or bracken mulches over the ground between rows of raspberries and other soft fruits greatly relieve the toil of weeding, but it is not desirable to put straw around strawberries until the fruits have set, as during periods of late frosts the straw layer prevents the heat in the soil from rising to warm the air round the plants and blossoms may be frosted which would have escaped otherwise. For the same reason it is not desirable to hoe and keep a loose tilth around strawberries at this critical time.

If the ground can be watered now, and in most parts of the country the soil is very dry, the sun's heat will penetrate better and the ground will warm up more quickly.

Although the chemists work assiduously to find new and more potent weedkillers, selective and otherwise, they have not been able to solve all problems. The rock garden or border of shrubs or hardy flowers, where perennial weeds like convolvulus or ground elder have become established, are most exasperating. If the weeds could be hoed off every week they would eventually die out, but such attention is seldom possible. Spot-treating the weeds by painting them with a selective weedkiller, or better still the potent specifics based on the chemical known as 245T, will usually destroy them, but several treatments may be necessary, and when a border of hardy flowers becomes a mass of growth it is often impossible to carry on with it.

PATHS AND DRIVES

Sometimes, with convolvulus, or bell-vine as it is often called, it is a good plan to half-bury a jar in the ground, half-fill it with selective weedkiller and put into it the growing tips of a dozen or more shoots. Eventually the chemical will penetrate to the entire root system.

Paths and drives often present a problem. Where it is possible to use a liquid weedkiller with safety, this is probably the most effective way of controlling weeds, and one containing sodium chlorate is still the most effective and lasting. But sodium chlorate is a most potent chemical and even minute traces of it seeping down to the roots of plants, or being washed down a slope by rain, can cause much damage to cultivated plants. Where this danger exists, a flame gun used several times in spring or early summer at fairly short intervals will usually clear up a drive or a paved courtyard.

The tulip season is now beginning, with all the lovely and colourful varieties of *Tulipa Kaufmanniana*. In many soils especially the quick-draining types where the bulbs can have a hot summer's baking after the growth has died down, these tulips will often increase. They are infinitely lovely, and although some of the newer varieties are expensive the older ones are now coming down in price to a point where they are worth buying to flower beside the daffodils or to carry on the display as the daffodils fade.

New Weapons For The War On Weeds.
FROM A GARDENING CORRESPONDENT.

The Times (London, England), Saturday, Apr 14, 1956; pg. 9; Issue 53505. (1038 words)

Category: News

© Times Newspapers Limited

Gale Document Number:CS151606926